

# Introduction & Background

## *Our Common Ground*



“Our Common Ground” is the name of a renewed focus for the Network for Peace through Dialogue. It will continue discussion of topics that surfaced during the international conference titled “Neighborhood by Neighborhood: How can we build a sustainable world?” sponsored by the Network in 2002, which included representation from the Philippines, Germany, Zimbabwe and the US. “Our Common Ground” will spread the understanding and practice of dialogue with a heightened awareness of the soil, water, air and elements we share. The goal is to deepen our understanding of our place in the universe and relationship to Earth.

It calls for a change in attitude from seeing human beings as masters of Earth to respect and awe for the dynamism of the living and inanimate components of Earth. For the past several years we have used dialogue techniques to spread awareness about the trafficking of humans for sex and labor. This billion dollar industry, too, is rooted in an attitude of domination resulting in horrific violence to vulnerable people. We call for respect for all people and a broader understanding of our relationship to all that exists.

The cultural historian Thomas Berry in his 1988 book, *The Dream of the Earth*, talks of Pax Gaia, the Peace of Earth. “Earth is a single community composed of all its geological, biological, and human components. It is indivisible.” ... “The air cannot be nationalized or privatized.” Yet “the peace of Earth is not some fixed condition, but a creative process activated by polar tensions requiring a high level of endurance.” (p. 220)

So we have work to do and will continue with this theme deepening our awareness of our relationship to Earth. We will do this through our Living Room Dialogues, blogs, Benchmarks (regular e-mails), Facebook, Twitter and Newsletters.

Virginia Dorgan, RSHM  
Executive Director, Network for Peace through Dialogue

## What is the goal?

To contribute to a shift in world view from an attitude of domination to a recognition of the interdependence of all the elements of Earth, living and inanimate.

## The need

We are seeing changes in nature caused by human production. Some examples are: climate change resulting in violent storms, rising sea levels, acidification of the oceans and food scarcity; air pollution and the extinction of millions of other species. People in poverty are most at risk. Until now many have taken for granted that nature is at our service. People need to become aware that rather than dominating Earth we need to rediscover our relationship. Geologists, environmentalists, Native Americans, theologians and spiritual leaders have been examining these relationships for a very long time.

For young people the danger appears critical and urgent. A Network for Peace staff person recently said it is in our self-interest to seriously reverse current trends. "If we 'extinct ourselves' the earth will go on."

Changes in attitude needed are from domination to respectful, cooperative participation with Earth and among all humanity. There will be struggles; great compromises are needed. We need to engage in very serious dialogue. This is a direct service addressing the most important issue impacting all living things.

## How will we address this need?

The Network for Peace through Dialogue will use its wide network, its program models both face-to-face and electronic, and its well-developed outreach resources to increase focus on this topic.

*Expanding our network to work cooperatively with related groups civic, corporate, activist, environmental and religious.*

*Continuing connections with individuals and groups world-wide through regular benchmark e-mails, newsletters, news alerts.*

*Building an electronic library of resources specializing in dialogue related to Earth consciousness on our Website for use by others.*

*Promoting materials for different age groups.*

*Creating and sponsoring face-to-face dialogues.*

## History and program of the Network for Peace through Dialogue

Network for Peace through Dialogue (formerly the Center of International Learning) was begun in 1985 by sociologists, theologians, and educators from Germany, the Philippines and the United States united by their world view and wanting to participate in transformative change. The Center was to provide ongoing learning, analysis and collaboration between people of the Northern and Southern hemispheres. There were two specific goals: to promote democratic processes and to work toward de-militarization.

In 1994 the US branch initiated its Living Room Dialogue series which it continues to this day. We have had programs for Harlem youth and nationwide conferences to promote dialogue.

The Network for Peace's programs based on a popular education model welcome a broad range of people. We call it grassroots education. In all sessions we engage the participants in dialogue, always explaining dialogue through our Dialogue Principles. Living Room Dialogues are open and free to people in the NYC region. They are advertised in our e-mails, Newsletter, by post card and on list-serves. Each session is limited to 13 participants to insure ability to dialogue and the information and ideas surfaced are spread broadly through print and social media. Twice a month messages, reports, events and questions are sent by e-mail to some 1,200 people through Benchmark. At the time of this writing we have 298 Twitter followers, 667 Facebook contacts with messages at least once a week. We send 1,500 Newsletters semiannually, and update our website on a regular basis. The Program will invite special interaction with the people and

groups involved in our 2002 international workshop and thereby insure a broader, international audience with Philippine, German, Zimbabwean participation.

## Implementing a two-year program 2014-2015 & 2016.

### Year 1:

October 2014 – Honor Sr. Miriam Therese MacGillis, OP of Genesis Farm at the Network’s annual Recognition Night to lay the ground work for building awareness of our relationship with Earth.

### Winter 2015

- Hold initial Living Room Dialogue (LRD)\*<sup>1</sup> sessions in which participants tell their stories about their developing awareness of our place in the universe and relationship to Earth. Publicize these stories in e-mails (Benchmark), on our website and in our newsletter.
- Begin making contact with related organizations and investigating how we can most effectively cooperate.
- Invite renewed relationships with our contacts in the Philippines, Germany, Zimbabwe to engage in and contribute to our dialogues through social media participation.
- Begin building a resource “center” in our website. This resource center will specialize in
  - inspirational stories from our dialogues and outreach,
  - articles, books and websites that connect dialogue and earth concerns

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**\* 1** The Living Room Dialogue (LRD) is a methodology developed by the Network for Peace through Dialogue for mutual learning in grassroots groups. The aim is to promote a development of understanding through dialogue with peers and specialists. The Living Room Dialogue process is one example of a popular education process in that it:

- Is inclusive and accessible to people with a variety of education levels,
- Addresses the issues people face in their communities,
- Is based on the lived experience of those participating in the learning,
- Is participatory, and
- Is interactive.

A broader description of this process can be found at [www.networkforpeace.com/what/lrd.html](http://www.networkforpeace.com/what/lrd.html)

- a listing of the related organizations with which we are connected
- Talks of Thomas Berry and other involved scholars in the field of environmental concerns

### Spring 2015

-Host student of the earth, Sr. Clare McBrien, RSHM, at our center in New York City for three to four days . During this time she would hold two intensive Living Room Dialogue sessions and consult with the Network Staff as well as other earth centered organizations with which Network members are associated. The dialogues will be accompanied with relevant Benchmarks, Blogs, Newsletter, Facebook, Twitter and Website entries.

- Continue making contact with related organizations and investigating how we can most effectively cooperate.
- Continue and develop initiatives with our contacts in the Philippines, Germany, Zimbabwe.
- Continue building a resource “center” in our website.

### Summer 2015

- Promote the resource “center” in our website to groups, educational institutions, teachers and professors to use in planning for Fall programs.

### **Year 2:**

#### Fall 2015

- Sponsor a series of LRD’s with people dealing with related issues through other means. Some of the people to include as specialists are Tom Milton, writer of novels incorporating environmental issues Sr. Bette Ann Jaster, OP, land proprietor who has implemented respectful land use practices at the Mariandale Retreat and Conference Center in Ossining, NY and Sr. Veronica Brand, RSHM, UN representative for the RSHM Congregation, to talk about the Sustainable Development Goals of the UN and how people can support their efforts.

Other guests may be invited to speak. Follow each session with associated Benchmarks, Blogs, Newsletter, Facebook, Twitter and Website entries.

- Invite another inspirational Earth centered individual and/or group to be honored at the October Network for Peace Recognition Night.

Winter – Spring 2016

- Dialogue related to contentious issues such as changes we need to make in the way we live in the “Economic North” and reparations to the countries of the “Economic South” that are suffering consequences of the North’s industrial practices. Deepening understanding of our relationship to Earth will continue to be part of these dialogues. Include associated Benchmarks, Blogs, Newsletter, Facebook, Twitter and Website entries.

Summer 2016

- Finalize resource “center” in our website and promote it again to groups, educational institutions, teachers and professors for use in planning for Fall programs.

## What will the benefit be?

Breadth and depth of understanding our relationship with Earth for all involved and reached by the program.

Practice in the use of dialogue to develop understanding and a greater appreciation of the use of dialogue in building peace.